

Akdeniz Language Studies Conference 2012

Exploration of English needs according to teachers and learners in the psychology major in Iranian universities

Froogh Abiri*

Islamic Azad University, Maragheh, Iran

Abstract

The aim of this study is to identify psychology students' needs in English for specific purposes. A total of 278 psychology students as well as 11 subject specific and language teachers participated in the study, which was designed on a qualitative-quantitative survey. Most of the students were dissatisfied with the devoted time to ESP, material used in the class, teaching methodology, and absence of motivation. Teachers responded total dissatisfaction of their students' language skills. It can be inferred that this course does not sufficiently take into account objectives of the course, resources available like materials, and the teachers' knowledge.

© 2012 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).
Selection and peer-review under responsibility of ALSC 2012

Keywords: ESP; needs analysis; psychology course

1. Introduction

The original flowering of the ESP movement resulted from general developments in the world in the 1950s and 1960s. ESP is essentially a material and teaching-led movement. It has been influenced by

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +00 000 000 0000; fax: +00 000 000 0000
E-mail address: froogh.abiri@gmail.com

developments and changes in applied linguistics and ELT but as a lively, ambitious, and young movement within ELT (Dudley-Evans, & St. John, 1998).

According to Tahririan (2008), prior to the change of government in 1979-80, the British Council had sponsored a major ESP materials initiative in Iran which generated many text books targeted to this population, but after this period, EAP and ESP were no longer a priority.

Efforts were made to find answers to the following questions:

1. What are the specific English language needs of Iranian psychology students?
2. What types of content and class activities are appropriate for psychology students?
3. What language sub-skills do psychology students need to develop?
2. The basic Conception of ESP

1.1. Needs Analysis

Needs analysis in ESP is the first step to design language courses which are more appropriate and accommodating in meeting learner's needs. According to Atai (2000), academic needs of students generally vary across time and instructional context, the requirement of an ongoing needs assessment for any educational institutions becomes crucial. In this study, it meets needs of psychology courses' students. What are the needs of psychology students? For what purposes they learn it?

According to (Robinson, 1991), Principles for Analysing Learners' Needs are: Priority of Communication Needs, Importance of Learning Needs, Context Needs, and Multiple Perspectives.

The role of the ESP teacher is a crump issue. It is an accepted fact that many teachers have historically avoided meaningful involvement in the organization in which they work (Henson, 2010).

Hayati (2008) believed that teachers in Iran must have an important role in designing ESP courses. They cannot isolate themselves from other great educational issues, such as the problem of the culture, discourse of the classroom, and psychology factors.

2. Methodology

In order to conduct a complete needs analysis, a triangulation of questionnaires, informal discussion with learners, interviews with teachers and observation of students in actual ESP classes were conducted through the investigation. During the course, learners' performances were assessed. Interview with the teachers who taught the ESP, could gain insights into the learners' current English proficiency, their specific weaknesses and strengths in the four skills, and comprehension in matters that enrolled for them. Participants

278 students participated in the present study, including one hundred and one people participated from Ardabil Islamic Azad University, fifty three from Tabriz University, forty five from Tabriz Islamic Azad University, forty six from Bonab (P N U), and thirty three from Azerbaijan Teacher Training University. The participants were selected randomly. Some of the ESP teachers participated in this study were specialist in psychology course and the others were specialist in language teaching. Three of them were language teachers and the other eight subject specific teachers. Participation was voluntary and the participants were free to refuse to answer any question and could withdraw from the interview any time.

2.1. Genders of Participants

Students who were participated in the research were both male and female. They were taking ESP as a compulsory course during their university studies. 40.65 percent of students were male and about 59.35 percent of them were female.

2.2. Instrumentation

The questionnaire was composed of different sections. The first section consisted of four parts, the second section consisted of yes/ no answers, and the third section was open-ended questions to elicit extended information. The questionnaires were based on the restructured model proposed by Richards (2001) used by Dehgan (2009) and NikuiNezhad (2007).

The second instrument was interview with ESP teachers and students. Among the professors of psychology and language teachers at five universities, eleven teachers separately participated in the semi-structured interviews based on a list of seven questions which investigated.

2.3. Procedure

To accomplish the purpose of the study, the following procedure was pursued. At first phase, the classes were observed with the aim of checking the materials and the methodology used. Then, the researcher interviewed with the professors. The responses provided by the interviewees were recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. Observation accomplished through one semester. The student questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on the existing instruments. Since the selected items were in English language, the researcher translated them into Persian in order to make the items easier and more usable for ESP projects.

3. Results

Research Question 1

What are the specific English language needs of Iranian Psychology students?

The first question focused on the skills, and it had to evaluate the emphasis allotted to each skill on the basis of needs expressed by the students themselves during the period of their studies. The question was based on the degree of importance of four skills to the participants.

55 percent of participants considered that reading comprehension is very important. The other part of the first question was related to the writing skills. Just 18.3 percent of the participants considered it very important, 27.7 percent of students consider speaking to be a more important skill. The last skill to be considered was listening. About 23.4 percent of the participants thought this skill is significance to a great extent.

Research Question 2

A: What types of content and class activities are appropriate for psychology students according to their attitudes?

About considering students interest, Just 26.26 percent of students agreed with this item. About 69.1% of the students believed that ESP courses were useful in their future lives. At the end of the course, students are expected to have some different abilities, for example, conducting further research, listening to lectures presented in English, speaking in English, and reading scientific English.

B: Causes of Unsuccessfulness in ESP Objectives according students point of view.

19.8% of the participants were unsatisfied of the lack of motivation; they were worried about their future. 19.1% of the students believed that the time devoted to ESP classes is limited. 12.9% of participants marked the material item, they believed that materials are not enough and suitable for objectives of the ESP course.

Research Question 3

A: What language sub-skills do psychology students need to develop?

The first part is related to the reading of textbooks. About 56.5 percent of students marked reading of textbooks as a significant sub-skill. 40.6 percent of students marked reading articles as an important sub-skill. About 30.2 percent of students marked writing case reports important.

It is concluded that students feel that reading a text is the most significant needed sub-skill. But according to teachers reading textbooks, magazines, and articles are necessary as a whole.

B: Are the following sub skill are important in ESP? To what extent?

In this question other sub-skills such as pronunciation practices, grammar points, translation, and application of pictures and graphs in ESP courses were assessed. Some results were inferred.

Results indicate that participants expressed correct pronunciation was very important. About 90.3% of the participant marked yes. They believed that learning correct pronunciation could lead to understanding the meaning of the text. About 66.5% of the participants agreed with the usefulness of the grammar points and about 68.9% of participants agreed with usefulness of translation. Lack of pictures and graphs led to long explainer sentences and it consumes students' time and energy. 70.5% of participants agree that pictures and graphs are useful.

Table 1. Descriptive Perception of Needs

Universities	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Levene's Test			
						Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
P.N.U-Bonab	46	10.96	2.69	6.67	17.50	1.122	4	273	.347
Azad University-Tabriz	45	12.67	2.62	8.33	20.00				
Azarbaijan University	33	11.41	3.39	.83	20.00				
University of Tabriz	53	11.62	3.16	6.67	20.00				
Azad University-Ardabil	101	11.84	3.48	.83	20.00				

The perception of students' target needs was compared in five universities. Variance analysis was also used. The zero hypotheses in variance analysis show the equivalent of the dependent variable in all levels of the independent variable. When the significance level of the test is less than 0.05, the zero hypotheses will be rejected.

Average and deviation of the perception of target needs were calculated in each university and the Leven's Test was used (see Table 1). The Leven's Test explores the equivalence of variance of the perception of target needs. The significance level of the Leven's Test is about 0.347. If the significance be more than 0.05, the equivalence of variances will be verified. As a result, the students' perceptions of target needs are significantly more than the average.

4. Discussion

Analysis of responses of the all of students and the instructors showed that they were similar. As relates to ESP skills, both students and instructors reported that the students' English language ability

was insufficient to meet the challenge of the large amount of English text they were expected to read in their specialized courses. Most of the instructors were particularly dissatisfied with the low reading comprehension ability of the students and indicated that they had no other alternative but to translate specialized English texts in order to convey message to the students.

The subject-specific instructors felt that students should learn the organization of psychological articles and texts and expected them to know how to read, summarize, and interpret a piece of research done in their field. Instructors believed that correct pronunciation was not crucial issue in ESP courses. Students do not need consume their time and energy to learning pronunciation. According to students' responses in open ended questionnaire, correct pronunciation of words is very significant, because it improves students' self-esteem, prepare them to increase their ability in communication activities, high level of reading text and understanding the concepts and meaning of the text.

Regarding students' speaking ability, instructors and students alike reported that the students lack the experience or confidence to speak; they need to improve their speaking skills for group discussion and presentation. They were of the opinion that the four skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing should be integrated in the English course content.

Concerning the use of translation skill, both students and instructors expressed; this skill is necessary for comprehension of the text. Translation is useful for meeting the concept of technical and semi-technical vocabulary. All the respondents believed that students only memorize the limited amount of technical and semi-technical vocabulary which they are thought in the ESP course in order to succeed in their examination. After they pass their English course, they still have the lack the ability to use grammatical structures and psychological terminology appropriately. Most respondents were of the opinion that the students need to develop their communicative competence in real context. The students reported that they encounter serious problems in 6th and 7th semesters when they contact with English articles related to psychology. Some of the subject-specific instructors suggested that EFL teachers should assign relevant topics related to the students' special subjects for oral presentations.

While instructors could see the value of these practices, they did not employ them in their courses. All the participants believed in the necessity of change in their students' English education. The specialized English courses should provide students with authentic academic language experiences. For example, students should be provided with opportunities to listen to long lectures and conversations involving multiple participants, to write longer papers, to participate in group discussions, and to give class presentations. The English curriculum, they emphasized, should integrate strategy training into the lessons so that students can develop effective language use strategies.

5. Conclusion

First, in considering the students, it can be seen that they express an urgent demand of English with varied forms. For these students, learning English is strictly for a utilitarian objective. Students should improve general English before entrance to university.

The subject-specific teachers often ask them to write reports based on this documentation, but in Persian. Hence, they rely on the English language teacher to help the students develop and master this ability of reading and even writing in English because they are not knowledgeable enough about English language science and Most of language teachers had not receive specific training about psychology.

Paying attention to the timetable period with the weekdays which is planned for the ESP in psychology course, occupies less privileged place and only the science subject is taken into account while the importance of the English subject is ignored. Language teachers, subject specific teachers, and material developers should carry out their tasks cooperatively. Such coordination and ongoing

assessment can ensure that the instruction is always informed, as regards the changing academic needs of learners, to make its plans accordingly.

Acknowledgment: I would like to acknowledge and extend my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Salahshoor, Dr. Asadolahfam, and Dr.Kuhi, who have made the completion of this paper possible.

References

- Atai, M. R. (2000). ESAP curriculum development in Iran: An incoherent educational experience. *Journal of the Faculty of Letters and Humanities*, 33(9), 17-34.
- Dehgan, L. (2009). *An ESP approach to course and material design for the students of industrial design*(Unpublished master's thesis). Azarbaijan University, Tabriz, Iran.
- Dudley-Evans, T., & St. John, M-J. (1998). *Developments in ESP: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Eslami, Z. R. (2010). Teachers' voice vs. students' voice: A needs analysis approach to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in Iran. *English Language Teaching*, 3(1).
- Hayati, A. M. (2008). Teaching English for special purposes in Iran: Problems and suggestions. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 7(2), 149-164.
- Henson, K. T. (2010). *Curriculum planning: Integrating multiculturalism, constructivism, and education reform*. (4thed.). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.
- Nikui Nezhad, F. (2007). A survey of academic needs of ESP students across three majors. Retrieved from <http://www.google.com/url?sa=...=nikui%20nezhad>
- Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. Cambridge, England: CUP.
- Robinson, P. (1991). *ESP today: A practitioner's guide*. UK: Prentice Hall.
- Tahririan, M. H. (2008). Developing a profile of the ESP needs of Iranian students: The case of students of nursing and midwifery. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 7, 277-289.